

PUERTO RICO SERVICE TRIP

NAME: Lauren Beard

STEP PROJECT CATEGORY: Service Learning

STEP FACULTY MEMBER: Deborah Kuzawa

MAJOR: Marketing

WHAT DID I LEARN?

My biggest takeaway during this trip was the power of service. Witnessing how grateful the people working for various schools, community centers, parks, etc. were has helped me understand that I have the ability to create great change in the world even if the tasks seem small. For example, picking up rusted screws from a park can offer a child somewhere safe to play or cleaning a community kitchen can provide a sanitary place for families to cook meals. Even the smallest act of kindness has the potential to change someone's life. Each person I met in Puerto Rico offered a new insight or valuable lesson that I will cherish forever.



WHY THIS PROJECT?

I have a passion for learning and an even greater passion for helping others. Fulfilling the service trip in Puerto Rico helped to feed the fire that I have for creating positive change in the world. It allowed me to discover and appreciate new cultural ideas pertaining to food, education, family, and life in general. I have been truly fortunate for the life and experiences that I have been given thus far and wanted to share it with the world. Being able to go to Puerto Rico helped to enhance my cultural knowledge and enabled me to grow in my enthusiasm for working with and for others. I hope to continue to find more ways to help and inspire others to step outside of their comfort zone and use their opportunities to make a positive impact in someone's life no matter how small.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

During my STEP experience in Puerto Rico, my peers and I had the wonderful opportunity to work with Institution for Second Language Acquisition (ISLA) to accomplish a variety of service projects focused on preserving Puerto Rico's historical culture and cleaning up debris from the hurricanes. The first week we were on the island, we also took daily Spanish lessons to improve our communication skills with the people we were working with. When we were not in class or doing service, our group went on many cultural excursions and had the chance to tour several cities.



WHAT WAS THE MOST TRANSFORMATIONAL PART OF THE PROJECT?

The transformational aspects of my travels were definitely learning about a new culture and discovering the personal importance and meaning behind service work. I was able to gain a greater understanding of the diversity that we have within the United States and how I am able to make an impact in the lives of others. Having the opportunity to travel to Puerto Rico to participate in service projects was a whole new kind of learning experience. Not only did I meet tons of new people, but I was completely immersed in a new culture and had to speak a different language. Although this posed as a challenge at first, I believe that it aided me in my communication skills that I will be able to use for the rest of my life. Speaking to others also allowed me to discover alternative perspectives to ideas that I have assimilated to while living in the same state for my entire life. I was able to gain a greater global understanding and knowledge in my travels to Puerto Rico.



FAVORITE PART OF THE STEP EXPERIENCE

The best thing about this project was the people. The group of peers that I went with formed an amazing bond with each other and Dr. Kuzawa that made everything about this trip exciting and fun. Each day we also had the opportunity to meet someone or learn about something new with a different and inspiring story. Being able to experience such a wide variety of personalities and discovering everyone's diverse background was both intriguing and enlightening.



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